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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 HARARE 000356

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE

STATE FOR AF/S AND AF/EX
NSC FOR SENIOR AFRICA DIRECTOR JFRAZER

E. O. 12958: N/A
TAGS: [EAGR](#) [ECON](#) [ZI](#)
SUBJECT: CFU Update on Negotiations with GOZ

Ref: a) Harare 239; b) Cape Town 76

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1. (SBU) Summary. Laboff met with Commercial Farmers Union (CFU) president Colin Cloete to discuss the ongoing negotiations between the farmers' group and the GOZ. Despite official claims that the two groups are in accord, the CFU reports that the two sides remain fundamentally divided on many issues. The GOZ wants its ownership of the seized 11 million hectares acknowledged as a fait accompli; the farmers want their title deeds honored. The GOZ wants farmers to "release" their farming equipment for the use of the newly-settled farmers, (ref a); the farmers want to retain their equipment (much of which is still mortgaged, all of which was individually purchased) for their own use when they return to their own property. Despite the clear standoff between the two parties at the national level, farmers are being approached on the ground and offered various deals by the local authorities to get them to produce food. Still, many farmers -- burnt by previous bad-faith deals -- remain wary, and others are simply uninterested in returning to farming without a fundamental shift in Zimbabwe policies. End summary.

2. (SBU) At a recent meeting, Cloete reported that GOZ attempts to paint a rosy picture of accord between itself and the CFU on the land resettlement program are completely without basis. Still, despite the absolutist language in the draft Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) published by the GOZ-controlled newspaper, ref a, Cloete believes that the GOZ is desperately aware of its precarious position in relation to food security. In any event, the two sides remain miles apart on almost all issues.

3. (SBU) In the MOU, the GOZ stated as its opening position that the 11 million hectares seized (approximately 97% of the land previously owned by white commercial farmers) was "STATE LAND" which would never revert to private ownership. However, after a subsequent meeting on returning skilled farmers to production between the CFU and the Minister of Lands, Agriculture and Resettlement Joseph Made, the GOZ seemed to back off from its initial position. At the outset of that meeting, Made stated that ownership of the land by the GOZ and its occupancy by resettled farmers were "non-negotiable." In response, Cloete and his deputies replied, "Then there is nothing to negotiate," closed their notebooks, and walked out of the meeting.

4. (SBU) Cloete later received a call from the minister who asked if the CFU members would consider a 35-year lease on their own lands; receiving a negative response, Made asked if a 99-year lease would be acceptable. Cloete responded that the sanctity of title deeds, and thus acknowledged ownership of the land, was non-negotiable from the farmers' perspective, and that leases (without full compensation for seized property) would never satisfy dispossessed farmers or entice them to return to production. According to Cloete, after these opening positions were stated, no further meetings have taken place. The MOU has not been signed, and the highly publicized "cooperation" between the GOZ and the CFU -- cited by Nigerian president Obasanjo, as well as Foreign Minister Zuma of South Africa (ref b), as a sound basis for lifting sanctions against Zimbabwe -- remains strictly cosmetic.

5. (SBU) Cloete also reports that the GOZ seems as distanced as ever from the situation on the ground. For instance, the Lands Committee in the Wedze area, a rich farming region southeast of Harare, recently approached between 15 and 18 commercial farmers in that area and appealed to them to return to production for "the good of the nation." Of that number, only 3 are actually producing. Similar appeals have in the past two years resulted in farmers planting crops on the basis of an oral assurance that they would be allowed to reap, only to be dispossessed by war vets and settlers shortly before harvest time. Based on previous experience, farmers remain wary about planting without a nationwide return to rule of law, or at least without local written guarantees that they will be allowed to harvest their crops. Asked about the coordination

between Minister Made and the local Lands Committee in such an appeal, Cloete responded that he greatly doubted if the Minister was aware that the local authorities were attempting to cut deals with the farmers.

16. (SBU) In fact, Cloete was convinced that Minister of Information Jonathan Moyo -- and not the Minister of Lands, Agriculture and Resettlement Joseph Made -- was actually in control of the negotiations between Made and the CFU. Cloete based his belief on the personal interactions between the two ministers at his latest series of meetings, as well as a clear sense of Made's subservience to Moyo's declarations at those meetings.

What Next?

17. (SBU) When asked what he saw as the best way forward for the commercial farmers, Cloete was unwilling to speculate on political solutions. Rather, he seemed to believe that actually getting the farmers to return to production -- even in the absence of political accommodations -- was vital. Referring to the situation in Wedze, Cloete stated that he would like to see six or seven farmers return, grow crops, and help address the food security situation. If they were successful, then perhaps another six or seven would return; later another six or seven, and so on.

18. (SBU) However, Cloete acknowledged that this would only help if the GOZ refrained from its continued attempts to seize and establish its own ownership of the property in question. He saw several pre-requisites to the return of farmers in a productive capacity. The first is a guarantee of personal security for farmers on their property. The second is a return to law and order on the ground, demonstrated by police support in confrontational situations rather than a routine and dismissive response that "we can't help, this is political," and clearly differentiated from an ephemeral return to the "rule of law." The third is a respect for title deeds; the fourth, availability of financing for the upcoming crop. The last prerequisite is the availability of a motivated labor force. As reported septel, many farmers -- even those who nurtured good relationships with their labor force -- are wary of placing their trust in workers who have demanded the payment of financially crippling severance packages and, in some cases, participated in looting their employers' property.

Comment

19. (SBU) Cloete remains unsure as to how best proceed with negotiations with the GOZ. He realizes that negotiation is risky, but he knows that without negotiation the farmers have no hope of returning to the land in time to make a difference for Zimbabwe's food crisis. Cloete believes that some commercial farmers must be in place and producing by the 2003/2004 growing season, or Zimbabwe may slide into an abyss which will not be remedied for generations. Cloete realizes that the CFU has been thrown a lifeline by the GOZ's need to have others -- the EU, the Commonwealth, the USG -- see some effort at breaking the current impasse, but he seems uncertain on how best to capitalize on the increased international attention to the destruction of commercial farming in his homeland. End comment.